

**Statement of Rand Beers
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before the
Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, Narcotics and Terrorism Subcommittee
of the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today about the situation in Colombia and about the threat it poses to regional security.

The situation in Colombia is critical. Colombia is increasingly threatened by well-armed and ruthless narcotics traffickers, supported by guerrillas and paramilitaries. The Colombian Government is unable to exert effective control over thousands of square miles of its own territory. Not only do Colombian people in these areas suffer from the violence and extortion of the armed groups; they also suffer from the government's inability to deliver services and the rule of law. As long as the government cannot operate, children's educational and health needs will go unmet, Colombia's globally critical environment will be left unprotected, and farmers will be unable to support their families through legitimate, protected trade. People in the border areas of neighboring countries are put at risk by the instability and violence as well. Unlike in past decades, when Colombia's legitimate economy performed better than most of Latin America despite the drug violence, today the impact of the violence on Colombia's investment climate has plunged the economy into deep recession. The corrosive powers of narcotics and narcotics money are ever-present threats to the institutions and economies of the region. The environmental threat may be even greater as coca growers clear-cut thousands of hectares of rainforest each year and pour toxins like potassium permanganate, sulfuric acid and acetone into the Amazon and Orinoco river systems. The situation in Colombia poses a considerable number of direct threats to U.S. national security interests as well, not the least of which are the thousands of Americans killed by drugs and drug-related violence each year, the losses to our economy from drug-related accidents and inefficiency in the workplace and the social and human costs of abuse and addiction.

After strained relations with the tainted Samper administration, President Pastrana's tenure offers the United States and the rest of the international community a golden opportunity to work with Colombia in confronting these threats. In Peru and Bolivia, we have partners with sustained success combating the drug industry that are eager to continue working with the United States. We should not squander this opportunity. What the United States does or does not do for Colombia over the next

several months will have a great impact on the future of our two countries, the Andean region and our hemisphere.

The Current Situation

Dealing with our own domestic narcotics problem must include helping Colombia dismantle the drug networks operating on its soil. Colombia is the world's leading producer of cocaine (two thirds of Andean coca cultivation occurs in Colombia with even more cocaine being processed and being transported within its borders) and is an important supplier of heroin to the U.S. market. We have all seen how these drugs have poisoned entire American communities, shattering families and destroying lives.

Colombia has also paid a high price. Illicit narcotics have corrupted its institutions and provided funding for illegal armed groups: powerfully armed left-wing guerrillas and right-wing militias that are perpetuating a 40-year-old insurgency. Today, large swaths of Colombia remain beyond the control of the Colombian government, and are incubators of lawlessness, violence and narco-corruption. Efforts to restore order in these prime coca and opium poppy producing zones are violently opposed by the narcotics traffickers and the various guerrillas and paramilitary groups in league with them.

Colombia must reestablish its authority over narcotics-producing sanctuaries. The country's many social and economic problems cannot be successfully resolved while narco-financed armed groups flourish in these lawless zones. Estimates of guerrilla income from narcotics trafficking and other illicit activities are undependable, but the drug trade is definitely their largest single source of income. Paramilitary groups also have clear ties to important narcotics traffickers and obtain much of their funding from them. Like his FARC counterparts, paramilitary leader Carlos Castano has publicly admitted taxing the drug trade. As a result, these groups are well funded and well armed. The strength of Colombia's armed insurgent groups has limited the effectiveness of joint U.S./Colombian counternarcotics efforts. In order for our counternarcotics programs ultimately to be successful, we cannot allow certain areas of the country, like Putumayo, to be off-limits for counternarcotics operations.

There is a need to re-establish government order in Colombia for human rights purposes. According to the Colombian NGO Pais Libre, guerrilla, paramilitary, and other criminal groups kidnapped 2,945 people last year, including 51 foreigners. This is a 33 percent increase from 1998, with the two busiest groups, the FARC and the ELN, combining for half of the abductions. Kidnapping is neither an insurgent nor a political statement. It is a crime. Colombia must disrupt the narco-financing of these groups, regardless of any political orientation they may claim, if any comprehensive solution to Colombia's problems is going to succeed.

PLAN COLOMBIA

The Government of Colombia has risen to this challenge and is confronting these threats. The “Plan Colombia” is a package of mutually reinforcing policies to revive Colombia’s battered economy, to strengthen the democratic pillars of society, to promote the peace process and to combat the narcotics industry. The strategy combines existing Colombian policies with ambitious new initiatives in forging an integrated approach to that nation’s most pressing challenges by strengthening government institutions, promoting economic recovery, carrying out social reform and boosting counternarcotic efforts. The United States did consult with the Colombian leadership throughout the plan’s development. But the plan was formulated, drafted and approved by President Pastrana and his team in Colombia.

Plan Colombia cannot be understood simply in terms of the U.S. contribution. In all, Plan Colombia is a \$7.5 billion program toward which President Pastrana has pledged some \$4 billion of Colombia’s own scarce resources. He called on the international community to provide the remaining \$3.5 billion. In response to this request, the Administration is proposing a \$1.6 billion assistance package to Colombia. A significant share of our package will go to reduce the supply of drugs coming into the United States by assisting the government of Colombia in its efforts to confront the cocaine and heroin industries. This focus on enforcement-related assistance, the so-called “stick”, will allow other sponsors to provide support for the “carrot,” developmental and humanitarian assistance projects for which they have special interests and expertise.

Now, the Colombians have asked us to provide support in implementing the Plan. Just as we consulted with them on “Plan Colombia,” they have consulted with us regarding this proposed assistance package. The result is a package of assistance that Colombia needs and can use. The composition of this proposal factors in Colombian contributions and the expected contributions of other supporters. International financial institutions are already engaged. Both the Colombians and we fully expect additional support to be forthcoming from bilateral and multilateral sources, primarily to assist economic development and social services.

Our assistance for Plan Colombia is intended to meet the needs that the other sources cannot. It is based on the shared hope of achieving peace and prosperity in Colombia through the overall reduction of illicit drug production and trafficking, thereby allowing the Colombian government to establish democratic control and provide services and infrastructure throughout its national territory.

Plan Colombia was designed with the benefit of knowing what has worked in Bolivia and Peru. With U.S. assistance, both countries have been able to reduce coca production dramatically. This was achieved through successful efforts to re-establish government control and bring government services to former drug producing safehavens. Both Bolivia and Peru combined vigorous eradication and interdiction efforts with alternative development incentives for small farmers to switch to legal crops and other licit ways to make a living. Colombia’s aim is to achieve a similar record of success.

In doing this, we cannot, and will not, abandon our allies in Bolivia and Peru. Their successes are real and inspired. But they are also tenuous against the seductive

dangers of the narcotics trade. This is why our Plan Colombia support package includes \$46 million for regional interdiction efforts and another \$30 million for development in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador. These countries deserve our continued support to solidify the gains they have striven so hard to attain. We have no intention of allowing cultivation and production of narcotics simply to relocate in an international game of cat-and-mouse.

Colombian Efforts

The Colombian National Police (CNP), under the direction of General Serrano, has upheld its standing as one of the premier counternarcotics forces in the world. Now, the Colombian armed forces have adopted a similar commitment to counternarcotics in support of the CNP's counternarcotics mandate.

At the same time, important cultural changes are also taking place within the armed services. Defense Minister Ramirez and General Tapias, Commander of the Armed Forces, have acted to remedy the tradition of human rights abuses and impunity that have tainted the military's international reputation and strained our bilateral relations. Respect for human rights remains an issue of high priority in Colombia, and the record shows that the current civilian and military leadership has the will to tackle this challenge. That said, all assistance to Colombian security forces will continue to depend on the vetting of all intended recipients as required by U.S. law.

The new leadership realizes that one of the best ways to attack the guerrillas is to attack their financing, in the form of narcotics profits. The Colombian Army has greatly expanded cooperation with and support to the Colombian National Police, and formed its first counternarcotics battalion. This battalion is a 950-person unit with a CNP platoon attached. We must continue working with the Colombian military to bring their capabilities up to a level where they can successfully operate alongside the CNP and contribute to the counternarcotics effort. The CNP alone is simply not large enough or properly trained to provide the security necessary for major operations against cultivation and trafficking in southern Colombia.

The need for counternarcotics assistance to Colombia is great and we will continue to provide it in the form of goods and services. However, we do not intend or desire to commit U.S. forces in Colombia. On the ground, our assistance will be limited. We will train approved units, we will provide technical assistance and we will help develop programs. Still, there is more we can do. The United States can continue to urge the international community to support Colombia in this struggle and we encourage other potential donors to follow the example of the Administration's proposed \$1.6 billion assistance package.

Components of U.S. Assistance Package

The Administration is proposing a \$1.6 billion assistance package to Colombia combining new monies with current funding. Building on current funding of over \$330 million in FY 2000 and FY 2001, our request for new monies includes a \$954 million FY 2000 emergency supplemental and \$318 million in additional FY 2001 funding. This

will result in assistance totaling just over \$1.1 billion in FY 2000. Over the two-year funding life of the proposal, 88 percent of the monies, roughly \$1.383 billion, will go for Colombia specific programs while the remaining 12 percent, approximately \$190 million, will support projects in neighboring countries and the region. And, while discussions of the proposal center on the security assistance it provides, 21 percent of the monies funds projects to strengthen the economy, assist farmers, promote human rights and generally support other social programs. What's more, spending between enforcement and social programs becomes even more balanced when the \$7.5 billion Plan Colombia is taken as a whole. This balanced and integrated approach is the strength of the plan.

The Administration's proposed assistance package has five components:

1. Push into Southern Colombia:

The world's greatest expansion in narcotics cultivation is occurring in insurgent-dominated southern Colombia. With this package, the Administration proposes to fund \$600 million over the next two years to help train and equip two additional special counternarcotics battalions which will move into southern Colombia to protect the Colombian National Police (CNP) as they carry out their counter-drug mission. The program includes 30 Blackhawk helicopters and 33 UH-1N helicopters to enable the counternarcotics battalions to access this remote and undeveloped region of Colombia. It will provide \$16 million in developmental assistance, providing technical assistance and agricultural inputs to the farmers of southern Colombia as well as \$15 million to help those displaced by conflict in the region.

2. Andean Interdiction:

Enhancing Colombia's ability to interdict air, water-borne, and road trafficking is essential to decreasing the price paid to farmers for coca leaf and to decreasing the northward flow of drugs. The component includes funding \$341 million for radar upgrades and to provide narcotics intelligence to Colombian security forces. It will support the forward operating location in Manta, Ecuador, which will be used for narcotics related missions. Additionally, these funds will provide assistance to enhance interdiction efforts in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador to prevent narcotics traffickers and growers from moving into neighboring countries.

3. Assistance for the Colombian National Police (CNP):

The Administration proposes additional funding of \$96 million over the next two years to enhance the CNP's ability to eradicate coca and poppy fields. This will upgrade existing aircraft, purchase additional spray aircraft, and provide secure bases for increased operations in the coca-growing centers. The CNP's ability to eradicate cultivation deep in guerrilla territory and at high altitudes has been hindered by security concerns and equipment needs. This funding, in conjunction with the counternarcotics battalions, will enable the CNP to reach into narcotics-growing areas previously beyond their reach.

4. Economic Development:

This element, totaling \$145 million, includes more than \$45 million of new funds to provide economic alternatives for small farmers in Colombia who now grow coca and poppy plus another \$30 million for regional efforts. Also included are programs to build schools, roads and clinics. Local governments will be strengthened through a \$15 million program. There are also funds to support efforts to protect fragile lands and watersheds. We anticipate that these seed monies will encourage other donors to support the Colombian government's robust agenda for alternative development, environmental protection, education and health. We will actively encourage such support.

5. Boosting Governing Capacity:

The final component totals \$93 million and includes a number of programs to increase the protection of human rights by supporting NGOs, creating human rights units in the CNP and the prosecutor's office, and offering protection to human rights workers. It contains more than \$20 million in programs to reform the legal system and train judges, prosecutors, and public defenders. It also will enhance Colombian abilities to attack financial crimes and kidnapping.

Conclusion

Colombia faces complex and daunting problems. Collectively, we may find it convenient to think of Colombia in terms of the narcotics crisis. In truth, that is only one element and it is linked, in a fundamental way, to the equally complex issues of economics, society, and an ineffective government presence in large areas of the country. At this moment, Colombia is a partner who shares our counternarcotics concerns and possesses the will to execute needed reforms and operations. Our challenge, as a neighbor to the north and a partner, is to identify ways in which we can assist Colombia in resolving its narcotics-related and other problems. I look forward to working closely with Congress as we continue to address these critical issues.